



NEWS RELEASE

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SIX MEMBERS OF MARIJUANA CONSPIRACY INDICTED

Indictment alleges that group imported over 1,000 kilograms of marijuana from Canada and grew over 1,000 marijuana plants in Alaska; alleged proceeds of drug sales used to develop “Platinum Jaxx”

Anchorage, Alaska – United States Attorney Nelson P. Cohen announced today, July 8, 2008, an indictment against several members of a marijuana trafficking organization was unsealed. The indictment alleges that Attila Szabo, 35, of Vancouver, British Columbia; Wallie Scott Vierra, 43, of Anchorage; Steven Michael Roberts, 32, of Vancouver, Washington; Keith Harrington Edwards, 38, of Anchorage; Linda Rae Harrigan, 55, of Anchorage; and Judy Carol Staffa, 62, of Manteca, California, conspired to import, grow, and distribute at least 1,000 kilograms of marijuana, and also to import the club drug MDMA, more popularly known as “ecstasy,” into Alaska.

The indictment accuses the defendants of being members of an international drug trafficking conspiracy responsible for importing marijuana and ecstasy from Canada, growing marijuana in Alaska, and distributing marijuana between 2000 and 2007. The indictment alleges that during the period of the conspiracy, the conspirators arranged for the shipment of approximately 100 pounds of marijuana, or “BC Bud”, from Canada roughly every two to six weeks, primarily concealed in secret compartments in fuel tanks mounted on the beds of pickup trucks. The conspirators sent cash to Canada to pay for the shipments, often concealing the cash in the same secret compartments used to transport the marijuana. The indictment charges that Szabo supplied the marijuana and ecstasy to the conspirators in Canada. Szabo is alleged to have coordinated with Vierra to arrange the timing and payment for the shipments of marijuana and ecstasy. Harrigan, Staffa, Roberts, and Edwards are alleged to have driven vehicles hauling the marijuana, ecstasy, and/or cash in secret compartments in fuel tanks between Alaska and Canada. The indictment lists 68 entries into the Alaska from Canada by the alleged conspirators in furtherance of the importation scheme. Edwards is also accused of manufacturing the secret compartments in the fuel tanks.

The indictment also alleges that Vierra and Roberts coordinated the distribution of the smuggled Canada pot once it arrived in Alaska. In addition, Vierra is accused of financing marijuana grow operations in Alaska in exchange for a percentage of the anticipated profits. Vierra, Roberts, Edwards, Staffa, and others are accused of tending these marijuana grows within the municipality of Anchorage. Roberts is accused of maintaining a growing operation in 2000 that consisted of over 1200 marijuana plants.

According to the indictment, Vierra also allegedly invested in the development of “Platinum Jaxx”, an Anchorage bar and restaurant, using drug proceeds, as evidenced by the deposit of over \$200,000 in checks in late 2005 and early 2006. Vierra is also alleged to have supplied cash generated by drug sales to purchase materials and pay contractors and employees for the startup costs of Platinum Jaxx. He is charged with four counts of money laundering in relation to these allegations. Vierra’s interest in Platinum Jaxx is the subject of a forfeiture count in the indictment.

Vierra is already facing similar marijuana conspiracy and money laundering charges in a separate indictment for his alleged role in the “Ranes and Shine” marijuana importation case. Vierra has been in custody since his July, 2007 arrest in Florida on the prior charges, and will be arraigned on the new indictment on a date set by the court.

Roberts was arrested at his home in Washington on Monday, and Edwards and Harrigan were also arrested Tuesday.

The maximum penalties for conspiracy in relation to drug trafficking are a minimum of 10 years in prison and maximum of life in prison, a \$4 million fine, and at least four years of supervised release.

This case was investigated by the Alaska State Troopers Major Offender’s Unit, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Internal Revenue Service–Criminal Investigations.

The charges in the indictment are merely allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

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